

Medieval Finds on Walton Street, Oxford, and the Settlement and Farmhouse of Walton

By R. R. INSKEEP

with contributions by JULIE HAMILTON, MAUREEN MELLOR and FIONA ROE

SUMMARY

Finds of pottery, tile, bones and a quern fragment at the rear of no. 75 Walton Street provide the first material indication of a late Saxon settlement at Walton, in the northern suburbs of Oxford. The finds also point to the presence of a substantial dwelling, and it is suggested that no. 73 Walton Street stands on the site of the medieval Walton farmhouse.

The finds described here are not in themselves remarkable, but are of interest for their context and location. Their discovery was initially a matter of chance, resulting from the laying-out of a small extension to a flower border at the rear of no. 75 Walton Street during the Easter weekend of 1975. In the course of turning over the soil the spade struck a very solid stone which, to the author, seemed out of place in the normally light gravelly soil, and the decision was made to explore the situation more closely. The 'very solid stone' proved to be part of the foundations of the early 19th-century terrace of cottages shown on both the 1850 Hoggar map of Oxford and the 1876 O.S. 1:500 plan, which were demolished after 1876 to make way for the existing terrace built about 1895. A little over 2 m. of the wall footings were uncovered, including a short return to the south, which terminated cleanly at what may have been a doorway. In the course of sectioning to examine the foundation it became apparent that the foundation trench for the wall had penetrated to just above a shallow horizon (referred to here as 'midden'), comprising oyster shell, bones, pottery, and a few scraps of metal. The western 1.5 m. of wall footing were recorded and then removed in order to get at this material, which occurred in a zone of a few centimetres at the base of the disturbed soil into which the cottage footings had been dug. After removal of the thin deposit containing the pottery and oyster shells it was apparent that clean, undisturbed gravel had not been reached, and the excavation was continued through a uniformly dark, sandy soil with some fine gravel components, until clean gravel was reached 0.76 m. below the midden. Whether this deeper feature (referred to as 'pit') was a ditch, or pit, or had some other origin is unknown, for its limit was found only on part of the curved northern wall of the cutting. The total area of the cutting at the level of the midden was approximately 1.25 square metres, and the volume of deposit removed from the feature below it was probably somewhat less than half a cubic metre. This deeper deposit contained pottery, bone, and a few other items. A few oyster shells are recorded from the upper part of the 'pit' fill.

The unit referred to as 'midden' yielded 37 pottery sherds; 2 pieces of burnt daub; 1 fragment of glazed tile (90 x 50 mm. approx.); 1 fragment of glazed ridge-tile, thumb impressed along the ridge; 2 pieces of shelly limestone roofing tiles; 1 small, plated copper alloy buckle; 1 large D-shaped iron buckle frame; several heavily oxidised iron fragments (?nails); 9 pieces of charcoal; 68 vertebrate faunal remains; 67 oyster shells (38 left, 29 right), and 2 freshwater mussel shells.

The 'pit' contained 51 pottery sherds; 7 fragments of burnt daub; 1 fragment of unglazed tile; 1 fragment of rotary quern; 93 vertebrate faunal remains; and 16 oyster shells (9 left, 7 right).

THE POTTERY by MAUREEN MELLOR

The excavation at no. 75 Walton Street yielded sherds of medieval pottery from two discrete contexts referred to as 'midden' and 'pit'; diagnostic sherds amounted to 5 from the 'midden', and 42 from the 'pit'. The pottery traditions present are well known from stratified sequences in Oxford, and the general source, area of manufacture and date can be inferred.¹

The small quantity of pottery recovered from the 'midden' was made at Brill/Boarstall in central Buckinghamshire (OXAM), and dates to the overlap at the end of the medieval period and the beginning of the post-medieval (16th century). Residual sherds of possible 11th-, 12th- and early 13th-century date are present, as well as a ridge-tile post-dating the 12th century, suggesting a substantial dwelling nearby.

Below the 'midden' a larger quantity of principally late Saxon products were recovered from the 'pit'. This included cooking and storage vessels in St. Neot's type ware, with evidence of internal residues and carbon indicating that it had been discarded after use, and a Stamford type glazed pitcher – both imported from the region within the Danelaw. Other local late Saxon wares were present, some tempered with calcareous gravel (OXAC) and others with sand tempering (OXY) suggesting a date not earlier than the second half of the 11th century. Two Romano-British sherds were also found, and a few sherds of later pottery, also from Brill/Boarstall which may have been intrusive from the overlying 'midden'.

The presence of late Saxon domestic rubbish so far from the central area is of considerable interest. The Brill/Boarstall type wares in the 'pit' mean that the assemblage is not securely dated. If, however, there is a chance that these sherds had been intrusive from the upper deposit, there is some reason to believe that the 'pit' as a deposit belongs to the first century after the Conquest, and includes wares typical of an 11th-century type. This is the first material indication of an 11th-century settlement at Walton.

FAUNAL REMAINS by JULIE HAMILTON

From the 'midden' 68 specimens were recovered, of which 36 were identifiable as to species and skeletal part (the figures are expressed as Number of Individual Specimens / Minimum Number of Individuals): Sheep 17/1; Cattle 14/1; Pig 1/1; ?Cat 3/1; Bird 1/1.

Ageing data:

Sheep – One scapula, proximally fused, from an animal of at least 6 months.

Two humeri, distally fused, from animals of at least 10 months.

One femur head, proximally fused, from an animal of at least 30 months.

One tibia, distally fused, from an animal of at least 18 months.

Cattle – One humerus, distally fused, from an animal of at least 12 months.

One tibia, distally unfused, from an animal of less than 30 months.

Sexing data: Nil.

Butchery: Bone was fragmentary and had been cut and split. None showed signs of burning.

¹ M. Mellor, 'A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, lix (1994), 17-217.

From the 'pit' 93 specimens were recovered, of which 51 were identified as to species and skeletal part: Sheep 27/2; Cattle 16/1; Horse 3/1; Red Deer 1/1; Cat 2/1; Amphibian 1/1; Bird 1/1.

Ageing data:

Sheep – One mandible plus teeth came from an animal which died at (?)2 to 3 years.

Two humeri: for one, no information; the other was unfused at the distal end, so came from an animal of less than 10 months.

Three metacarpals: for 2, no information; the other with distal end fused, so from an animal of at least 12 months.

Cattle – Two humeri: for one, no information; the other had distal end fused, so from an animal of at least 12 months.

Two radii, both fused proximally, so from animals of at least 12 months.

One femur with unfused proximal epiphysis, so came from an animal of less than 3½ years.

Sexing data: None, other than that the red deer antler evidently came from a male.

Butchery: All bones were in a fragmentary state; many had been cut and split. Knife marks were visible on sheep metapodials and cattle long bones. Seven fragments showed evidence of burning, as did one sheep skull fragment and a sheep mandible fragment, while a sheep humerus showed slight signs of burning.

There was no positive evidence for goat, and it is assumed that all ovicaprid remains were from sheep. The cat bones could all belong to the same individual. The bird is probably chicken.

THE QUERN FRAGMENT by FIONA ROE

The fragment consists of a small piece from the circumference of a rotary quern. The grinding surface has been unevenly pecked, but it has been worn smooth towards the outer edge, a feature which is typical of querns. The other side has been roughly worked to shape. The fragment now measures 10.2 x 8.4 cm. with a maximum depth of 3.5 cm.

The stone used for the quern is a medium-grained, pink to red micaceous sandstone. It shows traces of burning, particularly on the grinding surface, so a thin section was made (R 294), to facilitate a more certain identification as Pennant sandstone. This Upper Coal Measures sandstone was probably obtained from the Bristol coalfield, though it could also have come from the Forest of Dean, these being the two nearest outcrops, each at a distance of about 53 miles from Oxford.² The same stone also occurs slightly further away in south Wales. The thin section showed an iron-stained, moderately well-sorted sandstone, containing up to 75% angular quartz grains, with rock fragments, decomposed feldspar, a little muscovite and biotite, and some black fibrous material in a ferruginous matrix.

This is the first occasion on which a quern of Pennant sandstone has been recorded from a Saxon context in Oxfordshire. It appears to have been more usual in the Oxford region to utilise Niedermendig lava for querns in the Saxon period, and lava must have been brought up the Thames in some quantity from at least Middle Saxon times onwards. Niedermendig lava has a poor survival capacity in Oxfordshire soils, but nevertheless has been recorded from a number of sites including Yarnton,³ Eynsham Abbey,⁴ Abingdon Vineyard,⁵ and from Oxford itself such as finds from the Castle

² G.W. Green, *Bristol and Gloucester Region* (Brit. Geol. Survey, 3rd edn. 1992), 165.

³ F. Roe, 'The Worked Stone', in G. Hey et al., 'Report on the Excavation of Saxon Sites at Yarnton, Oxfordshire' (OAU, forthcoming).

⁴ F. Roe, 'Report on Worked Stone from Eynsham Abbey', in A. Hardy, A. Dodd and G. Keevill, 'Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire 1989-92' (OAU, in preparation).

⁵ F. Roe, 'The Worked Stone', in T. Allen, 'Report on Abingdon Vineyard, Oxfordshire' (forthcoming).

Mound,⁶ specifically 10th-century context in both Queen Street/St. Ebbes,⁷ and Church Street, St. Ebbes,⁸ and pre-12th-century contexts at the Clarendon Hotel.⁹

Pennant sandstone is a durable and serviceable variety of stone, surviving better in the ground than the Niedermendig lava. It was used in particular from Roman times onwards, both as a building stone (e.g. roofing tiles), and for a variety of objects. It was found especially suitable for whetstones,¹⁰ and known examples include one from a medieval context at St. Aldates, Oxford.¹¹ Being relatively small, these could be freely traded around. Pennant sandstone was not, apparently, used so frequently for rotary querns which, being weighty, require special arrangements for transportation. However there are known to be at least two late Saxon examples from Winchester.¹² There is another possible find from Cheddar,¹³ and some fragments from a Saxon site at Abbots Worthy, Hants.¹⁴ Two quern fragments from Eynsham Abbey are from a 12th-century context. Further unpublished pieces may await discovery in museum collections.

A possible explanation for the presence in Oxford of a sandstone quern that could have come from the Bristol coalfield lies in the juxtaposition of Pennant sandstone outcrops and areas where iron ores are known to have been obtained in the past. The Charter of Pucklechurch, of 950 AD, suggests that iron-working was taking place in the Pennant sandstone of the Coalpit Heath/Iron Acton area (in south Gloucestershire) during the 10th century.¹⁵ A large bloomery at Pucklechurch was also recorded in the Domesday survey.¹⁶ Iron ore could have been the main merchandise that was being sent to Oxford from this area in the 10th or 11th centuries. The quern could have been loaded on to a cart as a subsidiary commodity, taking advantage of transport that had already been arranged for a load of iron ore.

ADDITIONAL FINDS

In September 1996 a few sherds of pottery were recovered by the author from house foundations behind no. 82 Walton Street, and from the upcast from a deep gaspipe trench in Longworth Road. Each locality yielded a single Romano-British sherd. The foundation trench behind no. 82 Walton Street produced a fragment of strap handle from a large flagon of 13th- to 15th-century date, whilst the Longworth Road trench yielded a small body sherd of 12th- to 13th-century date, and a rim sherd from a deep-sided pan with combed decoration, of 13th- to 15th-century date.

⁶ E.M. Jope, 'Late Saxon Pits under Oxford Castle Mound: Excavations in 1952', *Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1953), 77-111.

⁷ M. Henig, 'Small Finds', in D. Sturdy and J. Munby, 'Early Domestic Sites in Oxford: Excavations in Cornmarket and Queen Street, 1959-62', *Oxoniensia*, I (1985), 87.

⁸ G. Egan, 'Stone Objects', in T.G. Hassall, C.E. Halpin and M. Mellor, 'Excavations in St. Ebbes, Oxford 1967-1976: Part I: Late Saxon and Medieval Domestic Occupation and Tenements, and the Medieval Greyfriars', *Oxoniensia*, liv (1989), fiche 4 no. 6.

⁹ E.M. Jope, 'The Clarendon Hotel, Oxford. Part I. The Site', *Oxoniensia*, xxiii (1958), 74.

¹⁰ D.T. Moore, 'The Petrography and Archaeology of English Honestones', *Jnl. of Archaeol. Science*, v (1978), 69.

¹¹ D.T. Moore, 'Hones and Querns', in B. Durham, 'Archaeological Investigations in St. Aldates, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977), 154 no. 17 and Fig. 33.

¹² S.E. Ellis and R.W. Sanderson, 'The Querns', in M. Biddle (ed.), *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester* (Winchester Studies 7, part ii, vol. 1, 1990), 295, nos. 3096, 3144.

¹³ F.W. Anderson 'Stone Objects', in P. Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar: Excavations 1960-2* (BAR 65, 1979), 234.

¹⁴ D.F. Williams, 'Stone from the Anglo-Saxon Site at Abbots Worthy, Itchen Valley, Hants.', (AM Lab. Report 184/87, 1987).

¹⁵ M. Redknap and M. Young, 'The Iron Industry of South-east Wales in the Thirteenth Century', in N. Naylor, *The Magor Pill Medieval Wreck* (CBA Research Report 115/CADW Welsh Historic Monuments, 1998), 112.

¹⁶ R.F. Tylecote, *The Prehistory of Metallurgy in the British Isles* (1986), 188.

DISCUSSION

The settlement of Walton¹⁷ receives its first mention in the Domesday survey of 1086 where it is recorded that Roger d'Ivry held a manor in Walton assessed at 4 hides, with land for 2 ploughs, a serf, 13 bordars, a fishery and 6 a. of meadow. Three of these hides were subsequently granted by d'Ivry or his successors to the church of St. George in the castle. Henry I confirmed this gift c. 1127 and during his reign also confirmed an additional hide. This property, together with other possessions of St. George's, passed to Oseney abbey in 1149.

In 1122 a hide in Walton was confirmed to St. Frideswide's priory, presumably one of the 4 hides close to Oxford which were already held by the canons in 1066. A hundred years later this was granted to William, son of Niel the dean, who returned all his property in Walton to the priory before 1235 in return for certain benefits, including a lease for life of 'the principal house in Walton with its garden and meadow': this appears to be the first hint of a dwelling distinct from the cottages of the village. Almost all the priory's property in Walton and north Oxford was exchanged with Godstow abbey between c. 1250 and 1260 and in 1358, adding to property in Walton that Godstow had been building up during the 12th and 13th centuries. Thus by the late 14th century both Oseney and Godstow owned manors in Walton. At the dissolution both manors were granted to George Owen of Godstow, Henry VIII's physician, and in due course passed to his son Richard who, in 1573, sold them to St. John's College.

The Domesday entry suggests a very small settlement of a few inconsequential cottages, with no mention of any larger house or manor-house. In 1279 there were some 46 dwellings in Walton village, and in 1306 there is a mention of a grange (an independent monastic farm) belonging to the abbot of Oseney and said to lie on the west side of the street (the forerunner of Walton Street), which has been presumed to have occupied the site of the later manor-house.¹⁸ As late as 1381 49 people in Walton paid poll tax, but by 1541 there remained only 8 tenants on Godstow's manor, and none at all except, perhaps, the occupant of the farmhouse, on Oseney's.

The Brill/Boarstall pottery excavated from the feature designated 'pit' consists of only 3 sherds with maximum diameters of 30, 18 and 15 mm. respectively and, given the overwhelming preponderance of earlier sherds, can probably be regarded as intrusive. It is, therefore, very likely that the 'pit' feature and its contents belong to the late Saxon period and seem most likely to reflect the close proximity of one of the dwellings forming part of the original Walton settlement described in the Domesday survey. Apart from representing the first tangible evidence for the location of the settlement the finds provide a tantalizing glimpse into the life of the occupants. A few sheep and a cow or two may have been normal for a late Saxon peasant family; the horse, if they owned it, would be more surprising. The red deer antler may well have been a shed specimen collected as raw material for some small item of domestic use. What is, perhaps, more surprising is the presence of finer pottery, imported from a distance, alongside the local coarser wares. The small rotary quern, on which the family ground its grain, is also an unusual import, though in this case an essential one in the absence of a mill; there being no mention of one in the Domesday entry.

The late medieval and early post-medieval pottery and other materials in the 'midden' have a different interest. The glazed ridge-tile and two stone roof tiles suggest the proximity of a building rather more substantial than a peasant's cottage of the period and raise the question whether they might relate to the location of the late medieval Walton farmhouse.

¹⁷ This account of the early history of Walton manor is derived from *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 274-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 275.

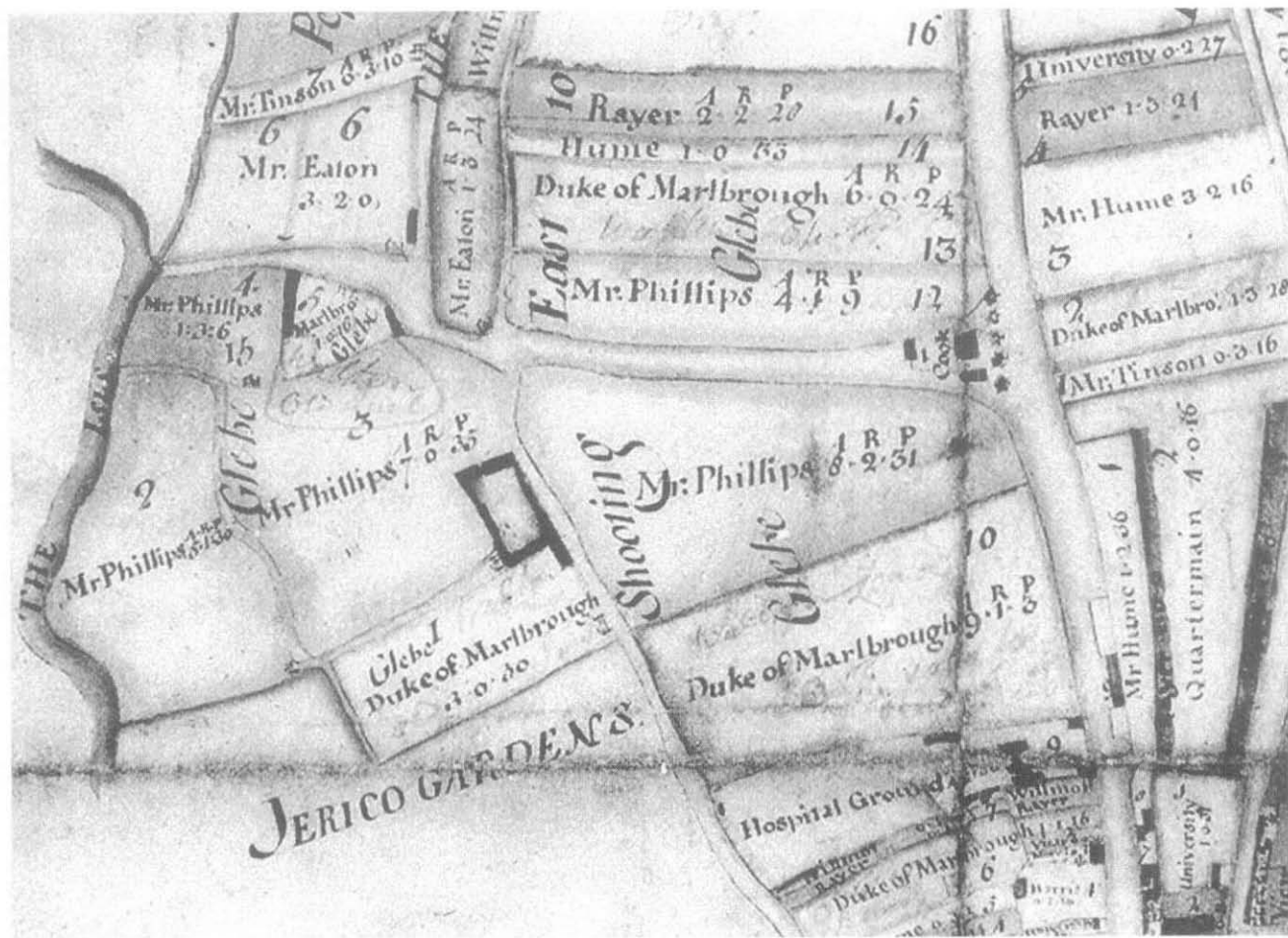


Fig. 1. Part of the 1769 survey of St. Giles's Parish (St. John's College MP 41), showing the northern end of Walton Street to its junction with the antecedents of Walton Well Road and St. Bernard's Road (formerly St. John's Road, before that Horse and Jockey Lane). Woodstock Road is the broad road running north-south at the right. The bold rectangle with offshoot is believed to mark the 18th-century location of the old Walton farmhouse.

A medieval survey in the college muniments could be taken to indicate that the farmhouse lay to the west of Walton Street, a view evidently favoured by the *Victoria County History*.¹⁹ When Richard Owen sold his holdings in Walton to St. John's College in 1573 the description of the property included reference to 'the fearme howse in Walton... with the sheephhouse and barn thereto belonging, and the great shephouse close next adjoining to the said fearme place, with a parcel of meadow on the west side to the said close adjoining...'.²⁰ Another pointer to location is Anthony Wood's mention of 'Walton Street, leading from Stockwell Street by Gloucester College to Walton farme', suggesting that the building in question lay near the northern extremity of Walton Street.²¹ It was possibly on the strength of these indicators, and Hurst's remark in his *Oxford Topography*²² that Walton farm lay 'near the Iron-works', that Andrew Clark in his edition of Wood's *City of Oxford* included a map on which he and Hurst located Walton farmhouse at a point, approximately, where lines projected from Southmoor and St. Bernard's Road would meet. The location indicated by the finds from the 'midden' would place the farmhouse, if we are correct in assuming that is what is represented, further to the east, and beside the ancient roadway, in the vicinity of the house now standing at no. 73 Walton Street. This suggestion finds some support in 'A Map of St. Giles's Parish in Oxford Surveyed in Decr 1769' in St. John's College muniments (MP 41), part of which is reproduced in Fig. 1.²³ If, as is suggested, the bold rectangle represents a range of farm buildings around a central yard, the house at no. 73 Walton Street would be located along the eastern edge of the rectangle (north is at the top), approximately three-quarters of the way from the SE. corner.

Judging from the bend at the north end of Walton Street, which has maintained its line on a variety of maps subsequent to the 1769 map, the northern side of the outlined rectangle appears to lie close, though on a slightly different orientation, to the boundary between nos. 75 and 76 Walton Street. On the 1769 map the southern side lies along the boundary between lands leased to Mr. Phillips and the duke of Marlborough respectively. So far as one can ascertain by comparison with the 1957 O.S. 1:2500 map (supported by some judicious pacing), this boundary would have lain very close to that between nos. 66 and 67 Walton Street, which continues westwards as the boundary between the back gardens of the houses on the north side of Cranham Street and those on the south side of Juxon Street. It looks very much as if that line preserves the 1769 boundary between the above-mentioned leaseholds. If this is correct, the area represented by the rectangle would have measured in the order of 69 m. x 35 m.

Prior to its rebuilding in 1991, the house at no. 73 Walton Street consisted of a rectangular timber-framed, three-storey building, with lath and plaster cladding (Fig. 2). Some time between 1850 and 1876 brick-built extensions were added at the rear.²⁴ In 1990 the main timbers of the house were found to be so rotted that in 1991 the front part of the house was demolished and rebuilt to a similar design in modern materials. Despite assistance from St. John's College (former owners of the house) and the County Archivist,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ W.H. Stevenson and H.E. Salter, *The Early History of St. John's College Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. n.s. i), 527.

²¹ A. Clark (ed.), *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford Composed in 1661-6 by Anthony Wood*, i (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xv), 347.

²² H. Hurst, *Oxford Topography* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xxxix), 116.

²³ I am grateful to Julian Munby for bringing this map to my attention, and for suggesting that the boldly marked rectangle probably indicated a range of farm buildings around a central yard. Mr. Munby also kindly provided the copy for Fig. 1.

²⁴ The house is represented as a plain rectangle on the Hoggar map of 1850, but extensions at the rear are shown on the large-scale O.S. plan of 1876.



Fig. 2. View from the SE. of the house at no. 73 Walton Street prior to the demolition and rebuilding in 1991 of the 3-storey timber-framed building fronting the street. The 19th-century brick-built extension visible at the rear of the house was retained. (Photo by courtesy of S. Ardener.)

the author has been unable to discover when the original house was built. Both its orientation, with its longest dimension parallel to the road, and the materials from which it was built, are out of keeping with the early 19th-century development of this part of north Oxford, which took the form of terraces of two-storey cottages built in brick, with laterally placed front entrances: Vine Cottages in St. Bernard's Road, for example, are of this type, and carry a date of 1824. It therefore seems likely that 73 Walton Street was built at an earlier date, as a solitary building rather than as part of a general development programme. The original timber-framed house conformed to the plan of the 'centrally-planned house' as described by P. Smith²⁵ and has almost identical proportions to such a house designed in 1725 for the Trustees of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, for erection on their estate in Bottisham, Cambs.,²⁶ though it is not known whether there were ever any contemporary outshot buildings at the rear of no. 73. The plan had its origins in the mid 17th century, was common in the 18th and persisted well into the 19th century. The state of decay of the vertical timbers exposed prior to demolition was very similar to that of the timbers of the south wall of the King's Arms on the corner of Parks Road, Oxford, which were exposed in 1995 or 1996 for repair, and which had been built or rebuilt early in the 18th century.²⁷ Circumstantial evidence, therefore, favours a date earlier than the 19th century, and there seems a strong probability that the house before its recent rebuilding was a direct lineal descendant of the late medieval Walton farmhouse, built as a replacement some time in the 18th century. Further archival research might settle the matter.

²⁵ P. Smith, 'Some Reflections on the Development of the Centrally-Planned House', in A. Detsias (ed.), *Collectanea Historica: Essays in Memory of Stuart Rigold* (1981).

²⁶ M.W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (1961), Pl. XXIII.

²⁷ RCHM, *City of Oxford* (1939), 180.